GIG SAVERS™

Power Chords

A BASIC GUIDE

by COREY CHRISTIANSEN

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Power Chords

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by COREY CHRISTIANSEN

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Power Chords

The "Gig Savers" series has been designed to give aspiring guitarists answers to common questions in a brief, affordable, yet informative fashion. This volume deals with "Power Chords" commonly used in all styles of rock and roll and popular music. It is almost funny that power chords are responsible for making their users (in select cases, your results may vary) a ridiculous amount of money. Tunes that are made up of only three to five different power chords have been known to generate tens of millions of dollars. Power chords are also referred to as 5 chords (A5=A power chord etc.). They can be used to replace virtually all the major, minor, and seventh chords.

The root (R) is the letter name of a scale or chord. Since the fingerings for power chords in this book are moveable, all the diagrams show the root note. "Moveable" means that by positioning the chord shapes in different locations (frets and strings of the fretboard), each chord may be played in any key. For convenience, charts showing the root notes on each string of the guitar have been provided below. Remember, to flat a note, simply move it down (toward the nut of the guitar) one fret. To sharp a note, simply move the note one fret higher (toward the body of the guitar).

Root Notes on the Sixth and First Strings

Fret	0	1	3	5	7	8	10	12
Root Name	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E

Root Notes on the Fifth String

Fret	0	2	3	5	7	8	10	12
Root Name	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A

Root Notes on the Fourth String

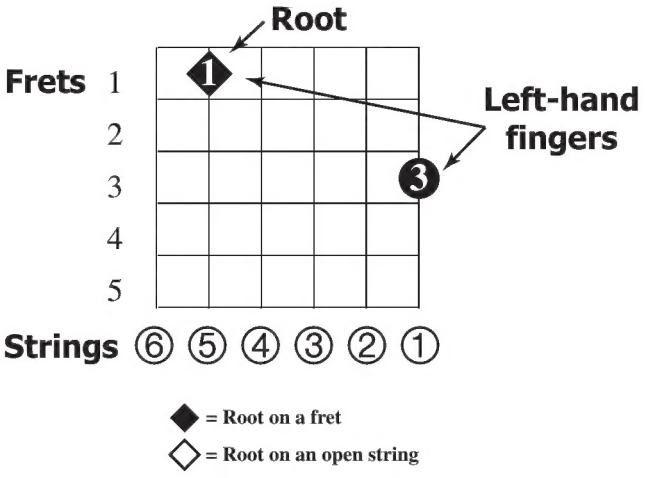
Fret	0	2	3	5	7	9	10	12
Root Name	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D

Root Notes on the Third String

Fret	0	2	4	5	7	9	10	12
Root Name	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G

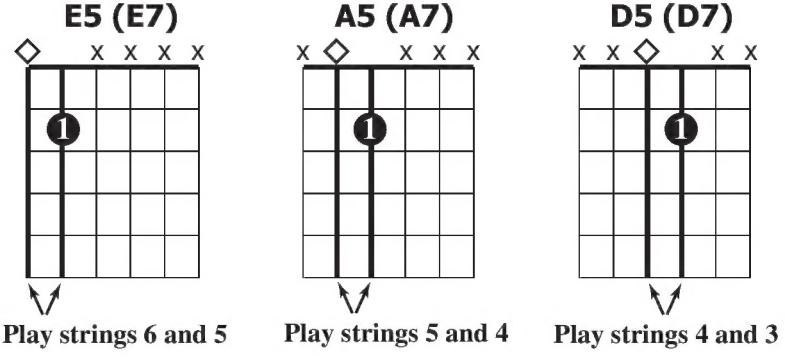
Root Notes on the Second String

Fret	0	1	3	5	6	8	10	12
Root Name	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B

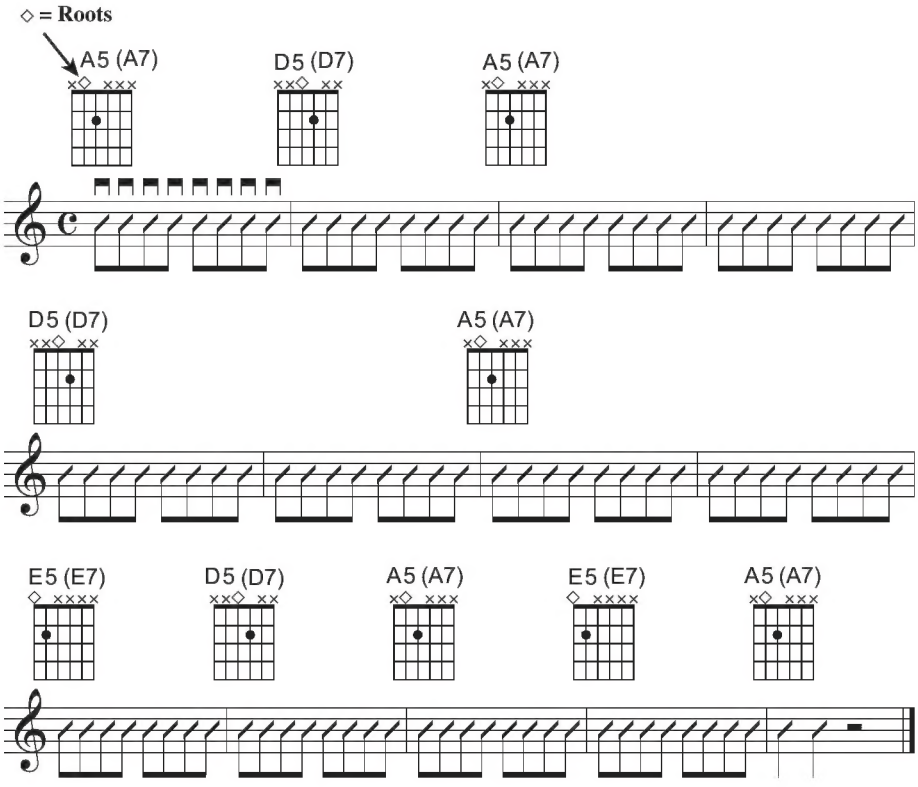


Power Chords

The easiest power chords to play are the open power chords. The following are E (open sixth string), A (open fifth string) and D (open fourth string). Patterns for these chords are shown below.



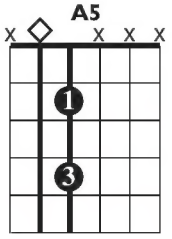
This chord progression makes use of only open power chords. Only a down-strum is used when playing power chords regardless of the rhythm. (When full open string chords are played, up-strokes are usually used when playing anything smaller in time value than eighth notes.)

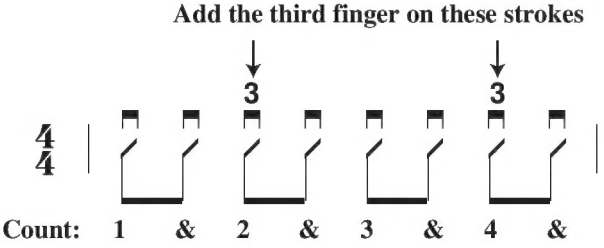


Add the Sixth

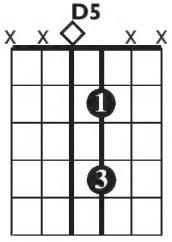
A common trick in classic rock and southern rock is to add the sixth when playing power chords. To add the sixth, follow the charts found below.

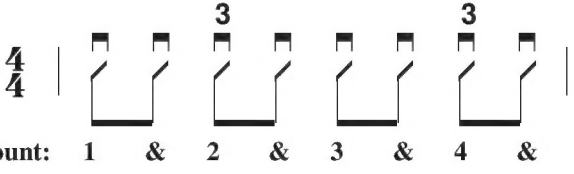
On the fourth stroke, lift the third finger. Do this twice in each measure.



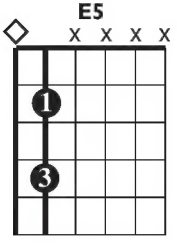


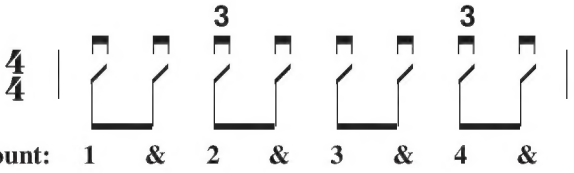
This technique could be used on the D5 chord by adding the third finger on the third string where the "X3" is drawn.



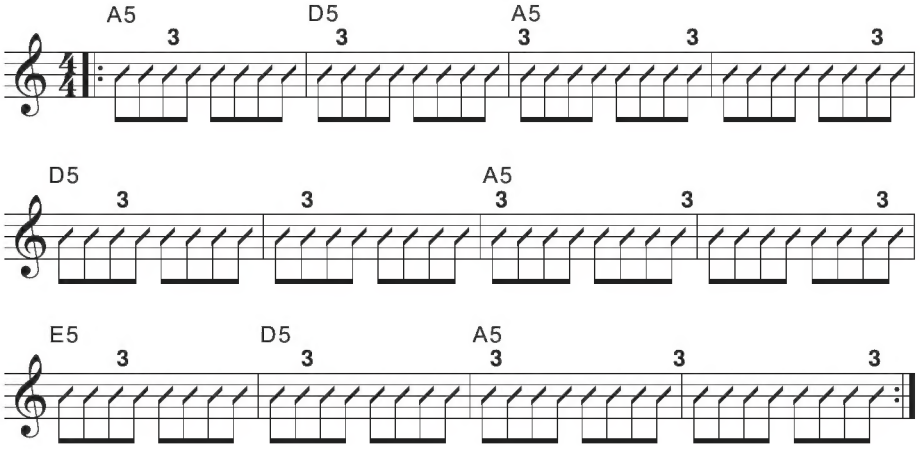


For the E5, add the third finger in the fourth fret on the fifth string.



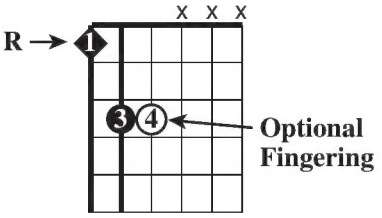


Play this twelve-bar blues which uses the variations on the power chord.



Moveable Power Chords

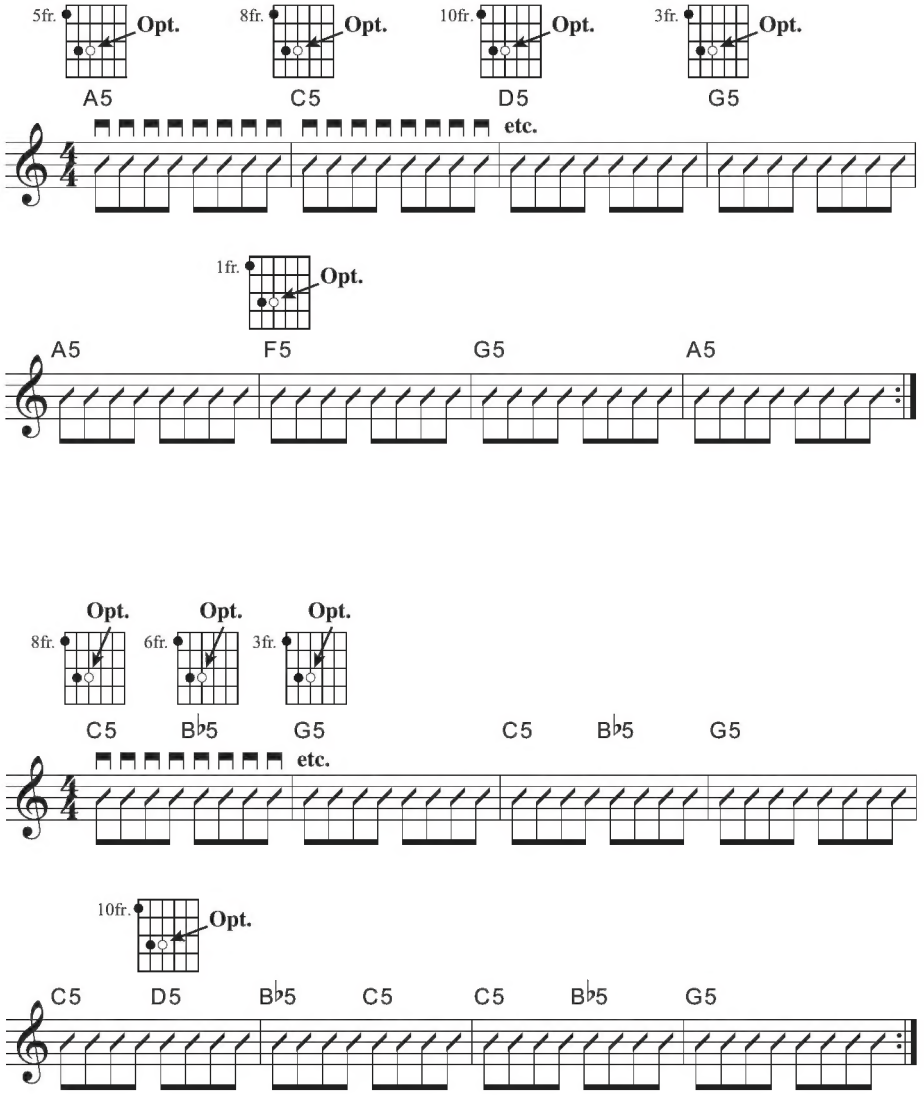
"Moveable Power Chords" are usually lumped into two groups. The first group are the power chords with the root on the sixth string. A fingering diagram for sixth string power chords is shown below.



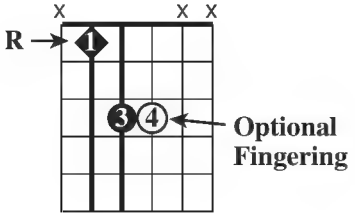
Root Notes on the Sixth String

Fret	0	1	3	5	7	8	10	12
Root Name	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E

Use the following progressions to become familiar with sixth string rooted power chords. Notice that the root may be doubled an octave higher on the fourth string.



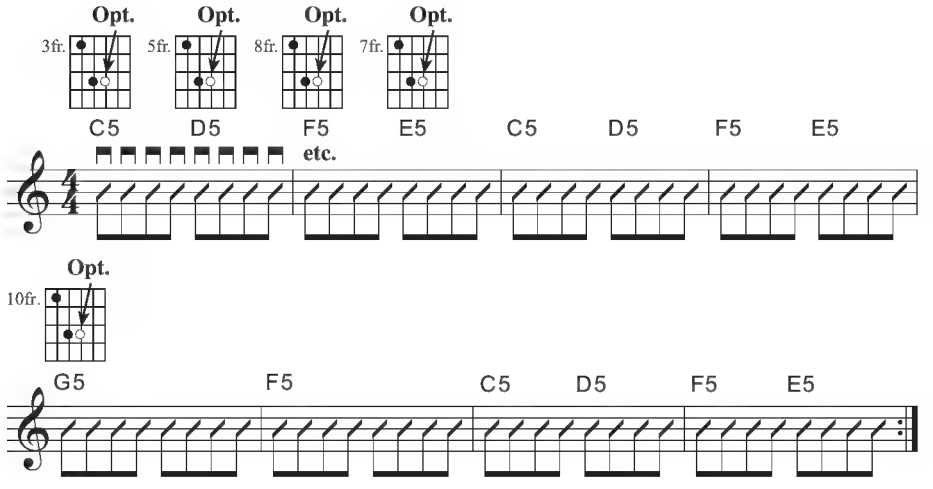
The next group of power chords are those with the root note on the fifth string. Notice that the root may be doubled an octave higher on the third string.

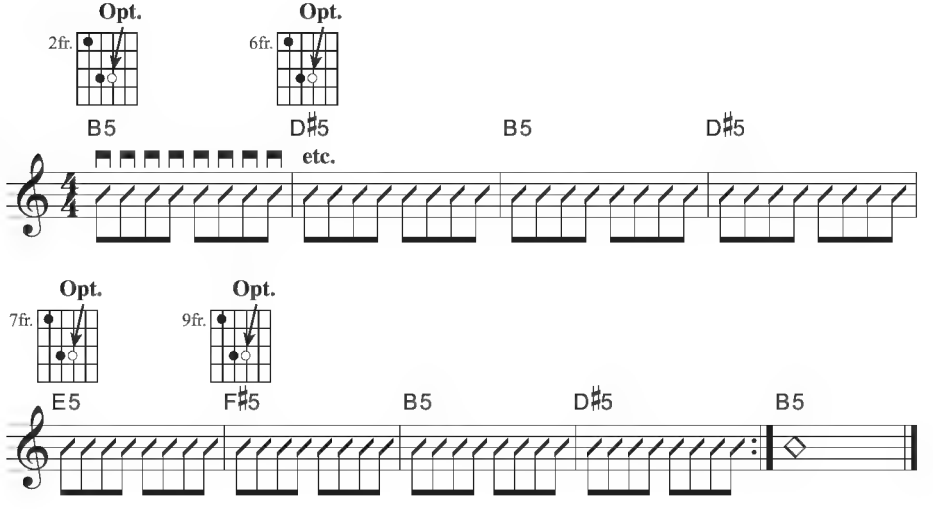


Root Notes on the Fifth String

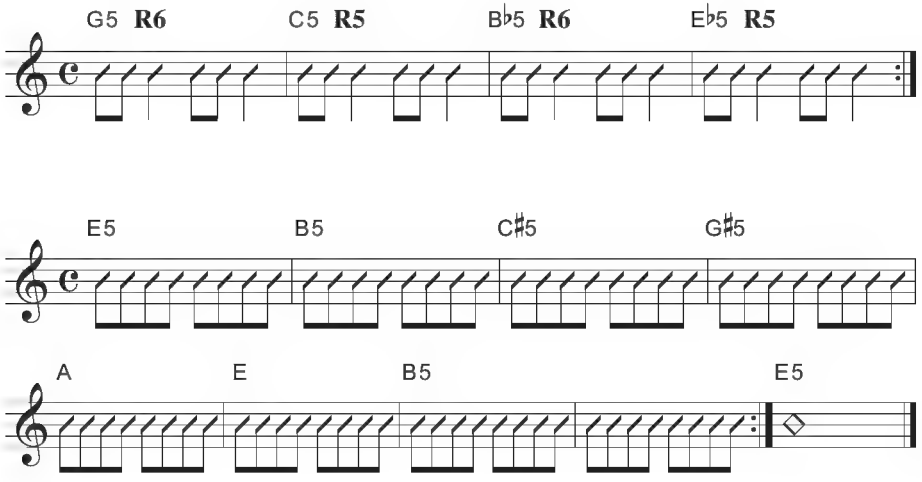
Fret	0	2	3	5	7	8	10	12
Root Name	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A

Use the following progressions to become more familiar with fifth string rooted power chords.

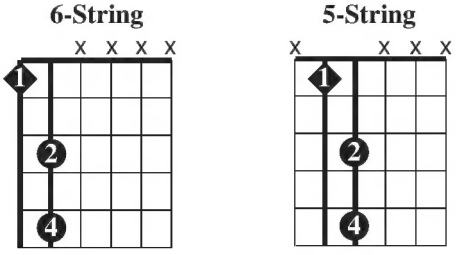


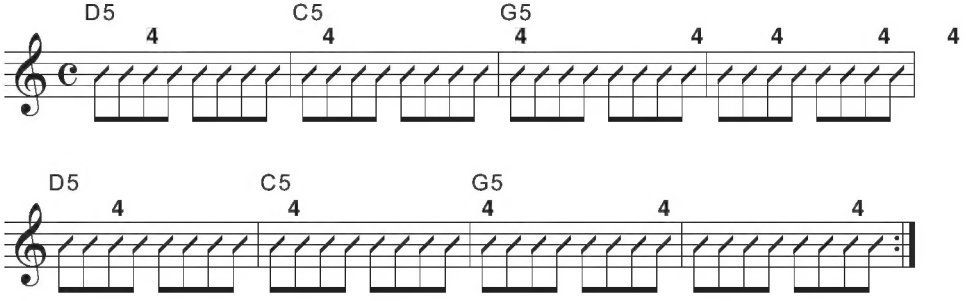


Having knowledge of sixth-string and fifth-string power chords gives guitarists two locations to play every chord. Use the following chord progression to combine both sets of moveable power chords. Pick chords that are conveniently located on the fretboard. R6 (root on six) and R5 (root on 5) are given in the first progression to help students combine both categories of chords.

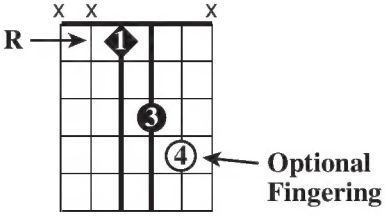


Try adding the sixth to the sixth-string and fifth-string power chords.





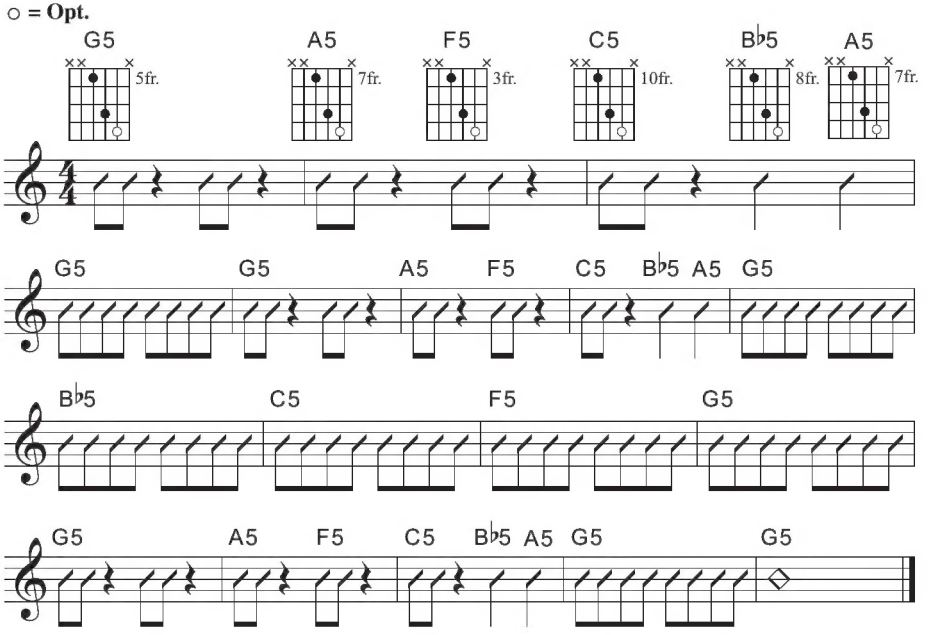
Power chords may also be played with the root on the fourth string. Here are the fingerings for this power chord. Notice that the root can be doubled on the second string.



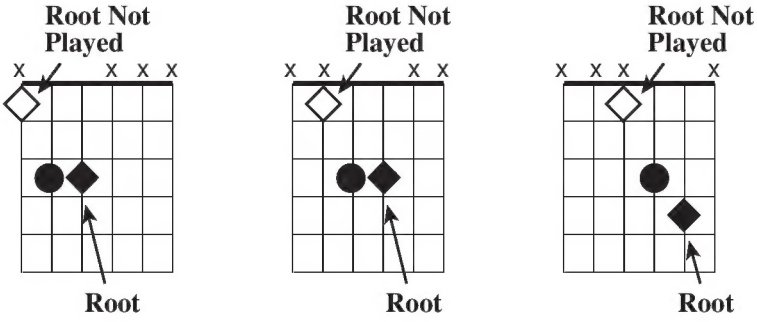
Root Notes on the Fourth String

Fret	0	2	3	5	7	9	10	12
Root Name	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D

Practice the following chord progressions using power chords with the root on the fourth string.

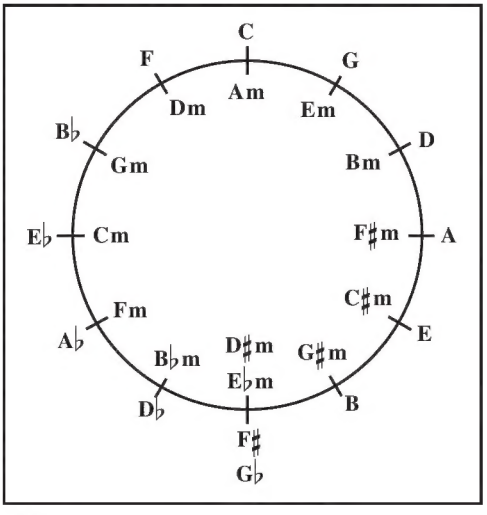


One variation for playing power chords is to play the fifth (the other note in the power chord) and the optional doubled root note only. This is a good option to use when the sound of a power chord without the bulkiness is wanted. Here are some diagrams of this type of chord. These shapes may be played anywhere a regular power chord is played. Go back and play all the exercises for power chord (except for those adding the sixth) using these power chord shapes.



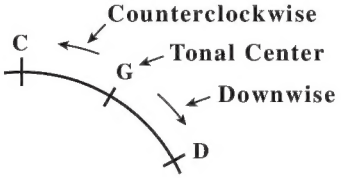
The Chord Clock

One of the beauties of power chords is they are not major or minor in quality. This means that the same A5 power chord can be used to substitute for an A major or an A minor chord. By knowing the basic chords in every key, any guitarist having an understanding of power chords can write great original chord progressions utilizing power chords. Also, by knowing the basic chords in a key, guitarists will have an easier time figuring out tunes by ear. The chart shown at right is referred to as the chord clock.



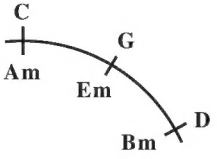
All twelve keys are represented on the clock and by using it correctly, all of the chords in each key can be easily determined.

To use the clock, first pick a key. (The key of G will be used for this example.) In the key of G, the G chord is said to be the "tonal center" or the chord that names the key. To figure out the other major chords in the key, simply go one chord clockwise (D) and one chord counterclockwise (C).



So the three major chords in the key of G are G, C, and D.

The minor chords in the key of G are the Am, Em, and Bm. Notice they are the minor chords on the inside of the circle "attached" to the three major chords.



All of the chords in the key may be used to create original chord progressions using power chords by adding the number 5 to each of the chords and taking away "m" from the minor chords.

G → G5 C → C5 D → D5 Am → A5 Em → E5 Bm → B5

Blank manuscript paper has been provided for writing original chord progressions. Figure out the chords in all twelve major keys. To figure out the chords in minor keys, repeat the same process only use a minor chord as the tonal center. The major chords in a minor key will be those on the outside of the circle "attached" to the three minor keys. (For example, the chords in the key of E minor are the same as the key of G.) Have fun using power chords.